



February 13, 2007

**Colorado man is convicted of arranging shipment of
5.5 kilograms of cocaine to RI**

A federal jury has convicted **Fernando Gonzalez-Ramirez**, of Aurora, Colorado, of arranging the shipment of 5.5 kilograms of cocaine to Rhode Island last January. Two other defendants have pleaded guilty to their roles in the transaction – one for driving the cocaine to Rhode Island, and the other for negotiating the deal from a liquor store in Providence.

United States Attorney Robert Clark Corrente announced the verdict, which the jury returned yesterday after about an hour's deliberation that followed a three-day trial in U.S. District Court, Providence. Chief U.S. District Court Judge Mary M. Lisi presided over the trial.

During the trial, Assistant U.S. Attorney Mary E. Rogers presented evidence that, in January 2006, agents with the **High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Task Force (HIDTA)** monitored conversations between Gonzalez-Ramirez, in Colorado, and **Estroredarcio Bernard**, who operated California Liquors, on Union Avenue in Providence. The two men discussed the price of cocaine that Gonzalez-Ramirez wanted to sell to Bernard, who is also known as Beligue. They settled on a price of \$19,000 per kilogram and Gonzalez-Ramirez said a shipment would arrive in Providence within a few days.

On January 30, agents observed a car with Colorado license plates outside California Liquors and subsequently followed the car to a warehouse on Hathaway Street. **Drug Enforcement Administration** agents later that day searched the warehouse and found 11

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packages, each containing ½ kilogram of cocaine. A DEA chemist testified that the packages contained 87% pure cocaine, its purest possible form. At \$19,000 per kilogram, its total value was \$104,500.

Agents that day arrested Bernard and the driver of the Colorado car, **Adalberto Bejarano-Gonzalez**, who is a cousin of Gonzalez-Ramirez. After additional investigation, federal agents arrested Gonzalez-Ramirez in Colorado in August.

The jury found Gonzalez-Ramirez, 34, guilty of conspiracy to distribute five kilograms or more of cocaine and aiding and abetting its distribution. He is detained pending sentencing, which is scheduled for May 11. Each offense carries a penalty of ten years to life in prison, plus a \$4,000,000 fine.

Bejarano-Gonzalez, the driver of the Colorado car, pleaded guilty to conspiracy and possessing with intent to distribute five or more kilograms of cocaine. Last month, Senior U.S. District Court Judge Ernest C. Torres sentenced him to 37 months in prison. Bernard, the operator of California Liquors, pleaded guilty last month to the same charges and is detained awaiting sentencing, scheduled for May 8.

As part of the investigation, federal agents also seized nearly \$100,000 in cash – \$9,300 from a home in West Warwick, \$70,500 from California Liquors, and \$20,000 that Bernard's wife turned over to the FBI in January. She was not charged.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Rhode Island State Police lead the HIDTA Task Force, and detectives from several Rhode Island police departments are assigned to it.

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